

WICKED, MAN!

Get sick, twisted and a definite hormonal charge out of *Wicked City*, the latest extra-dimensional animated epic direct from Tokyo.

by Robert Newton

Picture Snow White—innocent, beautiful and animated with the skill of a true artist. Now picture one of the Seven Dwarves—Dopey, perhaps—breaking into her room, mutating into a foul and grotesque demonlike creature and sodomizing the helpless lass with a tentacle. Those images will give you some clue as to what it's like watching the Streamline Pictures release *Wicked City*. If you choose to believe the rumors regarding Walt Disney's present physiological state, then it's probably safe to say that Uncle Walt is spinning in his cryogenic chamber, considering the radical changes the art form has seen since his pioneering days.

Wicked City is a beautifully animated and patently adult action fantasy from director Yoshiaki Kawajiri, one of Japan's leading animators, whose other works include *Lensman*, anime's "answer to *Star Wars*" (and his debut), *Goku: Midnight Eye* and the *Running Man* segment of Streamline's *Neo-Tokyo* anthology feature (an edited version of which appeared on MTV's *Liquid Television*).

Wicked City is also just one of many entries in this exploding cartoon subgenre. And like what *Meet the Feebles* and *Marquis*

did for puppetry—wrenching it out of the kid show ghetto—such graphically violent and sexual animated fare as *Wicked City*, *Urotsukidoju: Legend of the Overfiend* and *Guy: Awakening of the Devil* are redefining the way many people categorize animated films.

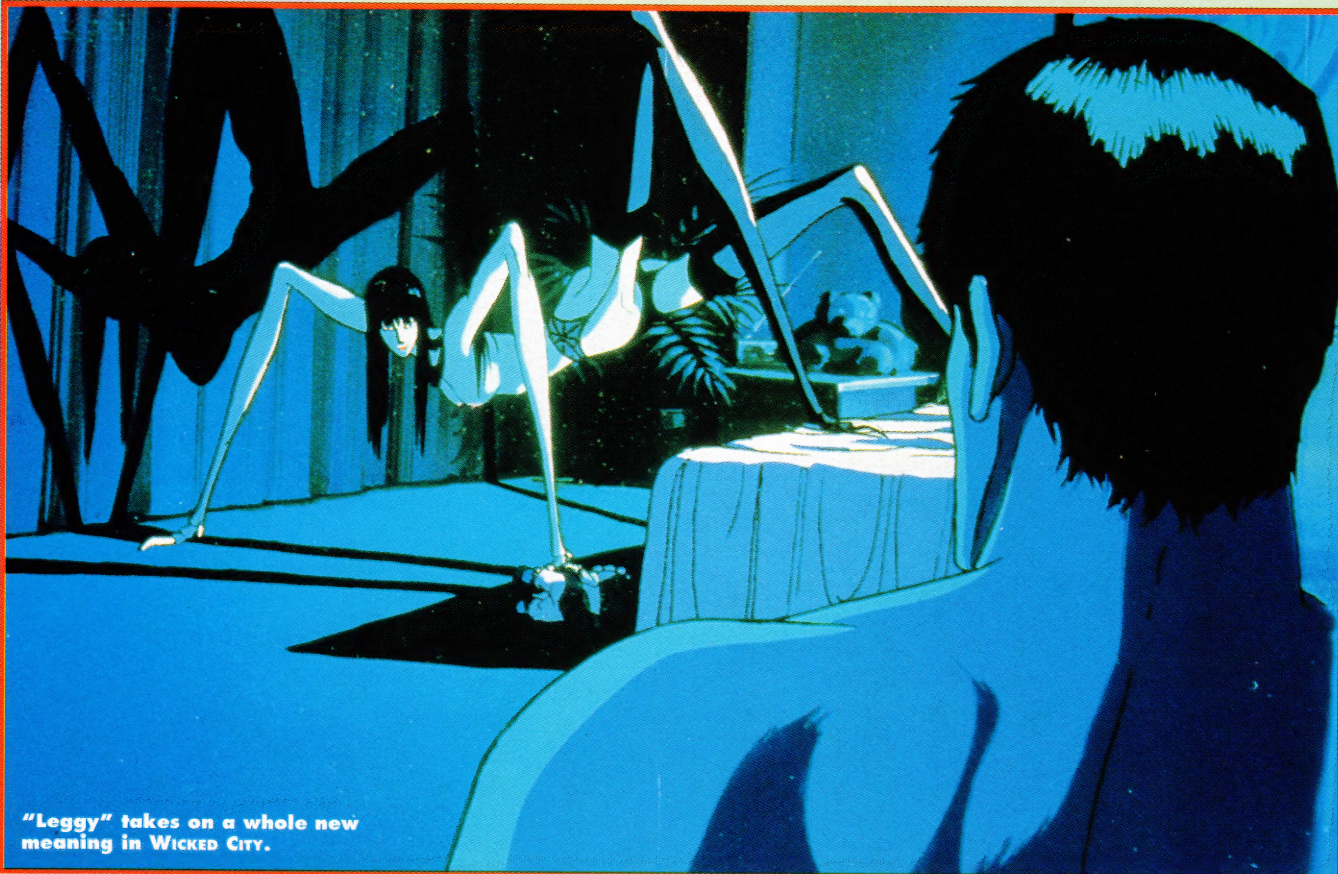
Wicked City, known to Japanese audiences as *Supernatural Beast City*, takes place in a Tokyo of the near-future. There, we find our suave hero, Taki Renzabuto, in a bar trying to score with an attractive young woman he has been hitting on for the past three months. She still hasn't allowed him to get even close, so the abrupt offer of her bed and her willingness to submit to his desires naturally surprises Taki. Not wanting to hurt her feelings, he graciously obliges and they retreat to her love nest.

It's at this early point that *Wicked City* will surely shock novices to the genre, as Taki and his lust object engage in sweat-soaked positions most often associated with the latest Alec Baldwin/Kim Basinger vehicle—complete with the appropriate sound effects and mood music. During the moment of "ultimate truth," however, the vixen's garter- and

Top: Taki takes aim on a Black World agent. Bottom: Taki's leggy seductress transforms into an arachnoid assassin ready to induct him into eunuchdom.







"Leggy" takes on a whole new meaning in *WICKED CITY*.

stockings-sheathed body contorts and mutates into a hideous spider woman, complete with toothed, snapping genitals—with which she attempts to viciously remove Taki's undoubtedly deflating unit [insert tired Bobbitt gag here].

Taki narrowly escapes his brush with eunuchdom and we soon learn of his lot in life—

that of a highly trained member of an elite force known as the Black Guard. The cooperative organization's purpose is to preserve the delicate balance of peace between the human world and the mysterious parallel Black World, populated by a race of physiomorphic mutants with supernatural powers—one of which was the arachnoid seductress who tried to take Taki out as she took him in.

Taki's latest mission has him



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—director Yoshiaki Kawajiri

enslave the human race than make peace—and who thus want Mayart dead.

"I wanted *Wicked City* to emulate the modern-day horror of Stephen King," explains director Kawajiri. "And to show everybody that animation is not just for children."

And that it is not. Equally

appealing and horrific, *City* should by no means be confused with the likes of the cutesy, doe-eyed antics of *Speed Racer*. Streamline Pictures' president and cofounder, Carl Macek, describes the film as "a cross between *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Basic Instinct*."

Macek, who was also a founder and co-owner (with John Kricfalusi) of Spumco, the former masters of *Ren & Stimpy*, began importing Japanese

paired with an equally alluring female Black World member of the Guard named Maki. Together, they must guard one Giuseppe Mayart, a diminutive, perpetually horny, 200-year-old Black World peace ambassador who stands as the sole hope for the renewal of the soon-to-expire treaty between the Black World and humankind. Their opposition comes from a team of belligerent Black World extremists who would rather


animation in the mid-1980s when he adapted such TV shows as *Captain Warlock and the Queen of 1,000 Years* and the incredibly popular *Robotech* series for American audiences. His hands-on production skills are still of use since he also produces the English-language dialogue for Streamline's various domestic releases, including *Wicked City*, *The Professional: Golgo 13* and the recently released anthology *Robot Carnival*.

Ultimately, the fruit of Macek's labors is both effective and impressive. "It manages to take away the feeling of animation and makes you think you're watching a live-action motion picture about real people," he says.

And that is the true test of any animated film—one which *Wicked City* passes without question.

"We start with a highly stylized product and then add intelligently translated dialogue," Macek says of the process of adapting the Japanese films for Western viewers. "We also have a unique way of treating sound. Most audiences don't understand the use of sound as an art form. Conceptually, it's much the same way in which photographers paint with light. By utilizing state-of-the-art recording and mixing techniques, we're able to add ambiance and perspective to make the final as realistic-sounding as possible. Most cartoons sound flat, but in our productions, the listener really believes that words are coming from the character's mouths.

"I was taken with *Wicked City* the moment I saw it," Macek continues. "It struck me that the images constantly conveyed the idea that people hide within themselves, for no one is really who he or she appears to be—identities are constantly changing."

Yes, like the face of animation today (however hokey that segue may sound). And, like Pinocchio only wanted to be a real boy, animation continues to seek public acceptance as a "real art form" (however hokey the analogy). And with more adult-oriented animation on the way, Uncle Walt rolls over again. 

"A cross between
NIGHTMARE ON ELM
STREET and
BASIC INSTINCT."

—English-language-version
producer Carl Macek on
WICKED CITY



Black World babe/Guard agent Maki is captured and brutally assaulted by Black World terrorists bent on enslaving humankind—all before her partner Taki's horrified eyes.

